

I Claim:

1. A system for collecting and recording data on an item as the item experiences changes in state over time, comprising:
  - (A) first data input means for capturing a first set of data pertaining to a first state of the item in a first environment;
  - (B) second data input means for capturing a second set of data pertaining to a second state of the item in a second environment;
  - (C) data processing means for storing said first and second sets of data in a database and selectively accessing said first and second sets of data from said database; and
  - (D) communication means for communicating said first and second sets of data to said data processing means.
2. The system of Claim 1, further comprising transportable data storage means for receiving and storing a third set of data, said transportable data storage means physically accompanying the item for a selected length of time.
3. The system of Claim 2, further comprising a third data input means for reading said transportable data storage means and accessing said third set of data.
4. The system of Claim 3, further comprising a first output means for writing a fourth set of data to said transportable data storage means.

5. The system of Claim 3, wherein said first and second sets of data at least partially include data observed about the item in the first and second environments, respectively.
6. The system of Claim 4, wherein said third set of data is captured by at least one of said first and second data input means.
7. The system of Claim 4, wherein a portion of at least one of said first and second sets of data is included in said fourth set of data.
8. The system of Claim 7, wherein a portion of said third set of data is included in said fourth set of data
9. The system of Claim 4, wherein said first output means is selected from the group consisting of: a 2D matrix label printer, a barcode label printer, a text label printer, a magnetic card writer, a magnetic stick writer, a floppy disk writer, a and a CD writer.
10. The system of Claim 3, wherein said third data input means is selected from the group consisting of: a 2D matrix label reader, a CCD camera, a barcode reader, a magnetic stripe reader, a magnetic card reader, an EID tag reader, a magnetic stick reader a CD reader, a floppy disk reader and an optical character reader.
11. The system of Claim 2, wherein said transportable data storage means is selected from the group consisting of: a 2D matrix label, a barcode label, an EID tag, a magnetic stripe, a magnetic card, a magnetic stick, a ROM chip, a text label, a floppy disk and a CD disk.

12. The system of Claim 1, wherein said first data input means is selected from the group consisting of: a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), a cell phone, a digital camera, a handheld computer, a personal computer with keyboard, and a weighing scale.

13. The system of Claim 1, wherein said data processing means includes a computer programmed with database management software.

14. The system of Claim 1, wherein said communications means includes a network and said data processing means is connected to said network.

15. The system of Claim 14, wherein said network is the internet.

16. A method for tracking an item as it changes state and environment over time, comprising the steps of:

- (A) collecting and recording a first set of data pertaining to an item in a first state in a first environment;
- (B) changing at least one of the first state and the first environment of the item to a second state and a second environment;
- (C) collecting and recording a second set of data pertaining to the item;
- (D) communicating the first and second sets of data to a data processing system;
- (E) storing the first and second sets of data in a database of the data processing system; and

(F) selectively accessing at least a portion of the first and second data sets.

17. The method of Claim 16, further including the step of reading a third set of data from first media physically accompanying the item .

18. The method of Claim 17, further including the step of writing a fourth set of data on second media, said second media then being physically associated with the item to accompany the item for further changes in environment.

19. Then method of Claim 16, wherein said step of collecting includes capturing observed data concerning the item when the item is in environment 1

20. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of collecting includes capturing observed data concerning the item when the item is in the first environment, the step of communicating includes transmitting the first set of data over the internet to the data processing system, the step of storing includes entering the first set of data into a database on the data processing system and the step of selectively accessing includes submitting a query via database management software to select data from the database in response to a user-defined criterion.

21. The method of Claim 16, wherein said step of accessing is conducted in the course of identifying the source of a health threat associated with the item.

22. The method of Claim 21, wherein the item is a food product.

23. The method of Claim 16, wherein the item is a component of a composite item having additional compositional items and further comprising the steps of tracking the additional compositional items and the composite item by performing the steps (A) through (F) for each.

24. The method of Claim 16, wherein the item is the performance record of an athlete.

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25. An item tracking system for collecting and recording data on an item as the item experiences changes in state over time, comprising:

- (A) a server computer with data processing capability and a database, said server computer connected to the internet;
- (B) a plurality of geographically separated node systems connectable to the internet, each of said plurality of node systems capable of capturing data concerning the item at various times and states of the item and communicating the captured data to the server via the internet for storage in said database, said server computer capable of generating a history of said item from the data captured and sent to said server from said plurality of node systems.

26. The tracking system of Claim 25, further including a label reader associated with at least a portion of said plurality of node systems, said label reader capable of reading labels physically associated with the item to obtain label data and communicating that label data to said server.

27. The tracking system of Claim 26, further comprising a label printer, said label printer printing labels representative of data concerning the item and thereby permitting the item to be relabeled with data that reflects an up-to-data product history.
28. The tracking system of Claim 27, wherein the type of label produced by said label printer is selected from the group consisting of: 2D matrix label, bar-code label and text label.
29. The tracking system of Claim 27, wherein the label printed by said label printer includes the internet address of said server and identification data for identifying the item.
30. The tracking system of Claim 25, wherein the captured data on the item is communicated to said server along with data indicative of the geographic location of the item and time.